

CREDO

I Believe in Ontario's Common Curriculum

**Philosophical Reflections for
Board Trustees and Teachers
Arising from the Liberal Arts Tradition**

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PREFACE

A few general introductory remarks are needed to set the frame of reference for the philosophical perspectives that I suggest in this booklet. I have undertaken this handbook out of a personal and non-partisan interest in learning with an eye to the common good. Although not teacher-qualified by any formal standards, since the 1970's I have been associated with the education of youth and adults. My present focus in learning, as articulated in this booklet is philosophical, and has been shaped through research in the areas of philosophy, theology, and psychology. These areas have presented the opportunity for me to learn about life from a “holistic” point of view, that is, from a point of view in which the learner is “greater than the sum of his or her parts.”

The internet versions of the Common Curriculum, (Ontario Ministry of Education) and, *Educating Together: A Handbook for Trustees, School Boards, and Communities* (2006) published by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association are the source documents for my reflections. It is to be noted that that the Common Curriculum is not a single document, but many documents taken together to make up the Common Curriculum. These individual documents are listed alphabetically on the Government of Ontario website which makes no suggestion as to which of the subjects is most important or least important in the arrangement of the Common Curriculum. The seventeen documents define what students are taught in Ontario public schools and detail what the public can expect students to learn. Further, these documents reflect the current areas of academic responsibility for all District Board Trustees in Ontario. The documents are perpetually renewed. It is the understanding of the Ministry of Education that these documents identify the areas about which the larger contemporary Western society seeks knowledge, training or learning.

In the present time, from my philosophical perspective, I see a change in the understanding of what it means to be a learner

within the Province of Ontario. The Ministry of Education recognizes that the areas of life which citizens desire knowledge, training or learning, arise from the cultural and social composition of the Province's population. Presently, we live within a multicultural population. As the multicultural composition of the Province continues steadily to increase the traditional understanding of the concepts of knowledge, training and learning will face challenges not known in the Province's previous Eurocentric culture. Do we see these new challenges addressed in the Common Curriculum? Do we accept that knowing about something equates to being trained in its application? Do we believe that learning about something reveals the truth of the matter? These are the type of philosophical questions that, through reflection, will offer some insight for us into the formation of Ontario's future citizens. The common good of both individuals and society is reflected in the Province's Common Curriculum. The Common Curriculum promotes learning from a humanitarian perspective that is not limited to the immediate cultural and social context of the learner. Rather, addressing the physical, psychological and mental well-being of the learner, the Common Curriculum promotes learning in light of the larger global traditions of the human community. I intend this handbook primarily for individuals interested in the direct governance of public learning in Ontario, both in theory and in practice, in the context of the Province's changing cultural and social fabric. However, while writing it I have kept in mind a wider public, that is, those with an interest in public learning for all citizens.

I suggest that the perennial philosophical questions arising within the common curriculum carry a new importance since we are no longer in a society founded exclusively on the values of the Christian faith. In these reflections, I intend to give these newly emerging questions, which most of Ontario's future citizens will encounter within the curriculum, a proper recognition in the public forum. In my philosophical approach to these questions I introduce the Common Curriculum *as if* the Common Curriculum is meant for us. In this way we are likely to gain new insights from the

curriculum that we would desire for others. [To think *as if* is a philosophical attitude identified by Hans Vaihinger in *The Philosophy of "As if": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1952).] To my mind, as Trustees and teachers we should have a desire for new insight into the decisions we take for the sake of future generations who will become, in their turn, Trustees and teachers. Throughout these reflections I have accepted the premise that learners of any age ought to be helped to achieve the highest degree of individual development of which they are capable within their community. This is a life-long process in which a cooperative approach is preferred to a competitive approach.

AMS

Thunder Bay, Ontario, September 2007

AIMS OF LEARNING

Some Philosophical Reflections

I. Learning is an Art Form

Learning is an art form that aims at some “good.” I follow the ancient Greek philosophical sense of the good, as an aim, or something sought after by the individual that may be innate or learned. In our day learning is recognized as an art form that aims at being a means, as well as, an end in order to achieve yet a greater humanitarian good. As an art form, learning seeks the goods, and the means, that are presented within Ontario’s Common Curriculum. This is done through personal activity free from undue constraint. This free activity includes the value of tradition and the influence of religion. [For a contemporary understanding of *activity* as a philosophical concept, see Hannah Arendt’s, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (1998)].

Below I reflect upon the sought-after goods of the various subjects that make up Ontario’s Common Curriculum, beginning with Technological Education.

Technological Education

Technological innovation influences all areas of life, from the actions of individuals to those of nations. It addresses basic human needs and provides the tools and processes for the exploration of both the known and the unknown world. “What is the sought-after good?” we may ask.

What is sought after is the power of technology, its pervasiveness, and its continual advances as an end. This demands a rigorous

curriculum and the commitment from educators to understand it, promote its responsible use, and enable us to become problem solvers who are self-sufficient and technologically literate. As sought after we must use, as a means, the technological skills and knowledge acquired to participate in a cooperative, global economy. We must become critical and innovative thinkers, able to question, understand, and respond to the implications of technological innovation, as well as to find solutions and develop technological products. Finding solutions and developing technological products beg the question of the type of future we want to create for ourselves.

As a means, technological education promotes the integration of learning across the disciplines. Technology supports our work in other subjects. It develops research skills, supports development in literacy and mathematics, and generates creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving. In addition, technological education promotes global citizenship and environmental awareness. In technological education, we also consider the options provided by various technologies as they affect our health and physical well-being. The connection to business studies is evident in the application of business principles to the study of the production and marketing of products in technological education. “What is the sought-after good?” we again may ask.

The philosophical integration of technological education emphasizes many key ideas, both theoretical and practical. The technological processes require skills that alter relationships between technology and the world, often with unpredictable consequences. Philosophically this requires nothing less than the integration of the sought-after goods of our cultural and social context.

Social Sciences and the Humanities

The disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities encompass four areas: general social science, family studies,

philosophy, and world religions each with their particular sought-after goods. Each acts as a set of ends and means, thus from a philosophical perspective, all share a common purpose.

As well, social science and humanities share a common subject to be studied: human beings within their world. Through methods of empirical data collection and scientific analysis, the social sciences study human behaviour and society via sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Through the examination of these structures, processes, and relationships within our human world we learn about the wide range of factors that have influenced peoples, cultures, and societies. The humanities explore the nature and purpose of human existence as an end. Through philosophy and theology, as a means, we study ourselves as learners and become aware of our ongoing attempts to understand and articulate the meaning and purpose of life. In the humanities, we learn some of the different world views, historical and cultural theories, philosophies, and social trends that have shaped us within our global world-view.

Social science and the humanities teach us fundamental skills, such as how to formulate appropriate questions, differentiate between evidence and opinion, recognize bias, and organize and communicate results effectively. As learners, we are required to research information from a variety of sources, to think critically and make connections between the ideas and facts we have gathered, and to use that information to solve problems through both independent effort and collaborative work.

Social science and the humanities give us essential knowledge and transferable skills that are applicable in various areas of our lives – in our personal and family life as well as in our workplace. Knowledge of the social sciences and the humanities provides us with a foundation for continual adult learning in such areas as positions in retail and service industries; for community college learning programs in such areas as early childhood education,

fashion design, and human resources; and for university learning programs in fields such as anthropology, consumer studies, family studies, food and nutrition sciences, human resources, psychology, philosophy, religious studies, and sociology.

Science

During the twentieth century, science has come to play an increasingly important role in the lives of all Canadians. There is every reason to expect that science and its impact on our lives will continue to grow as we enter the twenty-first century. Scientific literacy can be defined as possession of the scientific knowledge, skills, and habits of mind required to thrive in the science-based world of the twenty-first century.

As philosophical goods, excellence and equity support the goals of the science program within the Curriculum of Ontario. Accordingly, science is intended for a wide variety of learners, taking into account our interests and social goals. The overall intention is that all graduates of Ontario secondary schools will achieve excellence and a high degree of scientific literacy while maintaining a sense of wonder about the world around them.

Science can therefore not be viewed as merely a matter of facts, that is, as an end in itself. Rather, it is a subject in which we learn to weigh the complex combinations of fact and value that comprise the means to an end in modern society. As we approach science not only as an intellectual pursuit but also as an activity-based enterprise operating within our social and cultural context.

Native Studies

Native studies provides us with a broad range of knowledge related to Aboriginal peoples to help us better understand Aboriginal issues of public interest. We will develop the skills necessary to discuss issues and participate in public affairs as a common good. Through our involvement in Native studies, we will

increase our awareness and understanding of the history, cultures, world views, and contributions of Aboriginal peoples. These issues provide the ends embedded within the common good of our society upon which we may reflect.

As a means, in those Native communities where no Native language is spoken, the Native languages program will serve to introduce the Native language. In those communities where some Native language is spoken, the program will act as a means in the development and maintenance of that language. In communities characterized by greater fluency in a Native language, the program will support the use of that language as the language of instruction in those subjects that would be enhanced by the close relationship between language and culture. For all us learning a new language is a philosophical endeavour that leads to a greater good and appreciation of that way of viewing and understanding the world.

Mathematics

Today's mathematics curriculum must prepare us for our future roles in society. The curriculum of study must equip us with essential mathematical knowledge and skills; with skills of reasoning, problem solving, and communication; and, most importantly, with the ability and the incentive to continue learning on our own. Such is the end of a curriculum that provides a framework for accomplishing goals which do not end with graduation.

The choice of specific concepts and skills we choose to learn must take into consideration new applications and new ways of doing mathematics. Operations that were an essential part of a procedures-focused curriculum for decades can now be accomplished quickly and effectively using technology, so that we can now solve problems that were previously too time-consuming to attempt. We now have the means to focus on underlying concepts. In an effective mathematics program, we learn in the

presence of technology. Technology should influence the mathematics sought after and how it is taught. Powerful enabling computer and handheld technologies may now be used seamlessly in teaching, learning, and assessment.

The Ontario curriculum embeds the learning of mathematics in solving problems based on real-life situations. It is important that the connections between disciplines be carefully explored, analyzed, and discussed to emphasize for us the pervasiveness of mathematical knowledge and mathematical thinking in all subject areas. The development of mathematical knowledge as a means to an end is a gradual process. A coherent and continuous program is necessary to help us as learners see the “big picture”, or underlying principles, of mathematics.

Interdisciplinary Studies

New areas of study are developed to advance human knowledge and help us respond to the challenges in our changing world with insight and innovation. Today, we face an unprecedented range of social, scientific, economic, cultural, environmental, political, and technological issues as sought-after goods. To deal with these issues, we first need competencies derived from interdisciplinary skills that focus on the issues themselves, especially skills related to the research process, information management, collaboration, critical creative thinking, and technological applications. We need to understand new methods and forms of analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and evaluation that will allow us to build on skills acquired through the core curriculum.

To make sense of the growth and often disparate nature of data and information, we must become information literate. To do this, we must be able to combine diverse models of research and inquiry, integrate a range of information-management skills and technologies, and make them a means that applies information organization, storage, and retrieval to new situations and across many disciplines.

In our focus on real-life contexts, an interdisciplinary curriculum tends to be highly motivating. It helps us develop our knowledge and skills as a result of working on meaningful sought-after projects, which are often linked to the community. It also provides opportunities for us to explore issues and problems that interest us from a variety of perspectives. Cooperative education courses can easily be incorporated into an interdisciplinary curriculum to help us make the transition between school and the world of work.

Health and Physical Education

Our expectations outlined in this section concentrate on the development of personal fitness, competence, skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will help us deal with the variety of personal, social, and workplace demands in our lives. The primary focus is on helping us develop a commitment and a positive attitude to lifelong healthy active living and the capacity to live satisfying, productive lives. The health and physical education curriculum provides us with learning opportunities that will help us make positive decisions about all aspects of our health and encourage us to lead healthy, active lives.

The health and physical education curriculum also promotes important educational values and philosophical goals such as tolerance, understanding, excellence, and good health. Such values are reinforced in other curriculum areas, as well as in society itself. Parents, schools, health-care agencies, peers, businesses, government, and the media are all vital partners in helping promote these values. Working together, schools and communities can become powerful allies in motivating all of us thus providing the means to achieve our potential and lead safe, healthy lives.

Guidance and Career Education

The curriculum in guidance and career education actively involves us in research, inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making processes related to planning for postsecondary education,

training, or work. The guidance and career education program is designed for us to recognize our diverse abilities, strengths, and aspirations, providing us with knowledge and skills that will be benefit to us throughout our lives. The goals of the guidance and career education curriculum enable us to:

- *understand* concepts related to lifelong learning, interpersonal relationships, and career planning;
- *develop* learning skills, social skills, a sense of social responsibility, and the ability to formulate and pursue educational and career goals;
- *apply* this learning to our lives and work in the home, school and the community.

French as a Second Language

Through learning a second language, we strengthen our first-language skills and enhance our critical and creative thinking abilities; we also tend to become more tolerant and respectful of other cultures. The aim of the French as a second language curriculum is to prepare us to perform effectively in the challenging world we will face by providing us with the skills we will need to communicate in a second language. To make the curriculum relevant to our lives, knowledge and skills are learned in contexts that reflect our interests and experiences.

English Language

Ontario's increasing linguistic and cultural diversity provides many opportunities for cultural enrichment and global education for us as learners. At the same time, because of the variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds that we have, schools need to provide language programs to ensure that all of us develop the level of proficiency in English required for success at learning and in the workplace.

Language is the basis for thinking, communicating, and learning. We need literacy skills to enable us to receive and comprehend

ideas and information, to inquire further into areas of interest and study, to express ourselves clearly, and to demonstrate our learning. Literacy skills are important for higher education and for eventual entry into the workplace. Further, we must develop these skills in order to succeed in the challenging academic work of college and university. Literature is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As we read and reflect on a rich variety of literature, informative, and media works, we deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In our study of literary works from many genres, historical periods, and cultures, we consider personal and societal aspirations and explore possibilities personal growth as an end worthy in itself.

Classical and International Languages

Today we are living in an international community: nations and peoples throughout the world now depend on each other not only for their economic survival and social stability, but for the success of their undertakings in most areas of human activity. In such a world, communication on the international plane is of crucial importance, and knowledge of languages an invaluable asset. The study of classical and international languages helps us to develop the skills we need to communicate effectively with people from other countries and at the same time improve our skills in the English language.

The communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are more important than ever in the modern business world, in which the timely exchange of information is often the key to our success. Classical and international language programs provide ideal opportunities for us to develop and refine these important skills. Moreover, learning more than one language develops our ability to think creatively and to solve problems effectively. Studying other languages gives us the means to achieve new insights into our first language. In fact, it could be said that the only way to fully appreciate the particular nature and

function of any language is by studying and comparing several languages.

Language programs also introduce us to the heritage of other societies, and so increase our awareness and appreciation of other cultures. Through the study of languages, we gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of the different peoples who comprise Ontario's diverse society, and develop a deeper appreciation of and respect for the identity, rights, and values of others. The study of classical and international languages leads naturally to the exploration of topics related to the language under study and the culture of which it forms part. Such topics include art, history, geography, and social customs. It is clear that these topics may be understood as both an end and a means.

Canadian and World Studies

The Canadian and world studies program encompasses five subjects: economics, geography, history, law, and politics. In studying these subjects, we learn how people interact with and within their social and physical environments today, and how they did so in the past. Our learning in this discipline will contribute significantly to our understanding of Canada's heritage and its physical, social, cultural, governmental, legal, and economic structures and relationships. It will also help us to perceive Canada in a global context and to understand its place and role in the world community. The curriculum in Canadian and world studies is built around a set of fundamental concepts: systems and structures; interactions and interdependence; environment; change and continuity; culture; and power and governance.

Business Studies

Business activity affects the daily lives of all Canadians as we work, spend, save, invest, travel, and play. It influences jobs, incomes, and opportunities for personal enterprise. Business has a significant effect on the standard of living and quality of life of Canadians, and on the environment in which we live and which

future generations will inherit. Eventually, we all will encounter the world of business, whether we work in urban or rural areas. We must prepare to engage in business activity with confidence and competence. We need to understand how business functions, the role it plays in our society, the opportunities it generates, the skills it requires, and the impact it can have on our lives and on society, today and in the future. In short, the curriculum of business studies affects our lives as a means and an end.

The Arts

Experiences in the arts – drama, dance, media arts, music, and the visual arts – play a valuable role in the education of all of us. The arts nourish the imagination and develop a sense of beauty, while providing unique ways for us to gain insights into the world around us. All of the arts communicate through complex symbols – verbal, visual, and aural – and help us to understand aspects of life in different ways. We gain philosophical insights into the human condition through exposure to works of art.

II. The Illusion of Universalism

To establish a universal aim for education is an illusory goal in Ontario's multifaith society. Specific aims are the order of the day. No "one size" fits all the needs of Ontario's citizens in our pluralistic cultural and social make-up. In our contemporary situation, I propose that we replace this "ism" word - *universalism*, with *universality* and its opposite *specificity*. I propose this change for the reasons offered earlier. Our unique form of adaptability empowers us as, educators of ourselves and others, to specify our selves as "architects of the future" in contrast to being "custodians of the past."

Specificity within Technological Education

For the future we must construct and acquire the technological skills and knowledge required to participate in a cooperative,

global economy. We are capable of becoming innovative thinkers, able to question, understand, and respond to the implications of technological innovation, as well as to find solutions and develop unique products particular to our needs. Technological education focuses on developing our ability to work creatively and competently with technologies that are central to our lives. In this way technology functions as an end that is oriented to the future in a particular human way.

Specificity within Social Sciences and the Humanities

As we have seen, the disciplines of social sciences and the humanities encompass four areas: general social science, family studies, philosophy, and world religions. Each has its own focus, but all share a common purpose. They provide us with a range of opportunities to be architects of the future for positions in retail and service industries; for community college programs in such areas as early childhood education, fashion design, and human resources; and for university programs in fields such as anthropology, consumer studies, family studies, food and nutrition sciences, human resources, psychology, philosophy, religious studies, and sociology. Studies in social science and humanities courses will allow us to bring a broader perspective to our learning as architects of the future in areas such as history, geography, and English. In this way, the social sciences and humanities function as an end in a particular human way.

Specificity within Science

Achieving excellence in scientific literacy is not the same as becoming a science specialist. Achievement in both excellence and equity underlie the goals of the science program at the secondary level. Accordingly, as architects of the future we must design our courses for a wide variety of individuals, taking into account our interests and possible postsecondary destinations. The overall intention is that all graduates of Ontario secondary schools will achieve excellence and a high degree of scientific literacy while maintaining a sense of philosophical wonder about

the world around them. Accordingly, the curriculum reflects new developments on the international science scene and is intended to position science education in Ontario as a necessary and valuable tool for architects of the future.

Specificity within Native Studies

The diversity of cultural, linguistic, racial, and religious groups is a valuable characteristic of Ontario society, and as architects of the future we can help prepare all of us to live harmoniously in a multicultural society in the interdependent world of the twenty-first century. Canada is the land of origin for Aboriginal peoples, and the history of Canada begins with them. As the first people of Canada, and as architects of the future, Aboriginal peoples are unique in Canada's mosaic. Thus exploration of the development and contributions of Aboriginal societies in Ontario is central to an understanding of the social fabric of this country.

Specificity within Mathematics

The unprecedented changes that are taking place in today's world will profoundly affect our future. Today's mathematics curriculum must prepare us for our future roles in society. It must equip us with essential mathematical knowledge and skills; with skills of reasoning, problem solving, and communication; and, most importantly, with the ability and the incentive to continue learning on our own as a sought-after good. This curriculum, by preparing us to be architects of the future, provides a framework for accomplishing these goals. The development of mathematical knowledge is a gradual process. A coherent and continuous program is necessary to help students see the "big picture", or underlying principles, of mathematics.

Specificity within Interdisciplinary Studies

New areas of study develop to advance human knowledge and respond to the challenges of our changing world with insight and innovation. These include areas that often combine or cross

subjects or disciplines, such as space science, information management systems, alternative energy technologies, and computer art and animation. Today, we face an unprecedented range of social, scientific, economic, cultural, environmental, political, and technological issues.

To deal with today's issues, as architects of the future, we require interdisciplinary skills that focus on the developing issues themselves, especially skills related to research processes, information management, collaboration, critical and creative thinking, and technological applications. We need to understand new methods and forms of analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and evaluation that will allow us to build on skills acquired through the core curriculum.

In our focus on real-life contexts, interdisciplinary studies tend to be highly motivating. They help us develop our knowledge and skills as a result of working on meaningful projects, which are often linked to the community. As architects of the future we are to provide opportunities for us all to explore issues and problems that interest us all from a variety of perspectives. Cooperative education courses can easily be incorporated into interdisciplinary studies to help us make the transitions necessary in the future. An increasing number of colleges and universities in Ontario, in other parts of Canada, and around the world offer interdisciplinary studies programs at the postsecondary and graduate levels to achieve this end.

Specificity within Health and Physical Education

The expectations within the curriculum concentrate on the development of personal fitness, competence, skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will help us deal with the variety of personal, social, and workplace demands in our lives. The primary focus of this curriculum is on helping us develop a commitment and a positive attitude to lifelong healthy active living and the capacity to live satisfying, productive lives. In light of being architects of the

future we are to create healthy active living benefits both individuals and society. For example, by increasing productivity, improving morale, decreasing absenteeism, reducing health-care costs, and heightening personal satisfaction. Such praxis leads to other such as improved psychological well-being, physical capacity, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with stress.

Specificity within Guidance and Career Education

The guidance and career education program aims to help us become more confident, more motivated, and more effective learners. We learn how to identify and assess our own competencies, characteristics, and aspirations. We explore a broad range of options related to learning, work, and community involvement through a variety of school and experiential learning opportunities. With an eye to the future we develop learning and employability skills and strategies that we can apply in our secondary and postsecondary studies and in the workplace.

We identify and develop essential skills and work habits that are required for success in the workplace, as well as skills needed for effective communication, teamwork, and leadership. In our guidance and career education courses, we learn about the changing nature of work and trends affecting the workplace, and gain insights into the challenges and opportunities we will encounter in the modern economy. As architects of the future the curriculum allows for opportunities for us to practice the skills we are developing in both school and community contexts and to become aware of the importance of contributing to and cooperating with our communities.

As we learn about the career-planning process, we set goals for continuing education and work and develop the knowledge and skills we need to achieve those goals. The program helps prepare us for a changing world by demonstrating that a career is not just an occupational destination but also a journey that involves lifelong learning. It also teaches us to recognize and create

opportunities, make informed choices, and pursue our personal and career goals more effectively as we create the future of our society .

Specificity within English

Literature is a fundamental element of identity and culture. As we read and reflect on a rich variety of literature, informative texts, and media works, we deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In our study of literary works from many genres, historical periods, and cultures, we consider personal and societal aspirations and explore possibilities. Through the study of literature, we strengthen our own specific ability to use language as an effective tool for thought, expression, and communication.

Specificity within Classical and International Languages

The study of classical and international languages helps us to develop the skills we will need to communicate effectively with people from other countries and at the same time improve our specific ability in the English language. The communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are more important than ever in the modern business world, in which the timely exchange of information is often the key to success. Classical and international language programs provide ideal opportunities for us to develop and refine these important skills. Moreover, learning more than one language develops our ability to think creatively and to solve specific problems effectively. Studying other languages will also give us new insights into our first language. Language programs also introduce us to the heritage of other societies, and so increase our awareness and appreciation of other cultures. Through the study of languages, we gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of the different peoples who comprise Ontario's diverse society, and develop a deeper appreciation of and respect for the identity, rights, and values of others.

Specificity in Canadian and World Studies

What we specifically learn in the various courses in this discipline will contribute significantly to our understanding of Canada's heritage and its physical, social, cultural, governmental, legal, and economic structures and relationships. It will also help us to perceive Canada in a global context and to understand our place and role in the world community. The specific subjects in Canadian and world studies are fundamentally connected to one another and can easily be linked to other secondary school curriculum areas as well allowing us to become effective architects of the future. For example, civics has close ties with history; geography with science and technology; history with arts, languages, and social sciences and humanities.

Specificity within Business Studies

The business studies program will build a strong foundation for those of us who wish to move on to further study and training in specialized areas such as management, international business, marketing, accounting, information and communication technology, or entrepreneurship. It will also provide practical skills for those who wish to move directly into the workplace. Engaging in the world of business involves us studying individuals, communities, and organizations, assessing our needs and problems, and generating solutions. Business studies draws upon facts, concepts, and processes from many other fields of specific study.

We are motivated and learn best when we understand the relevance of what we are studying. The business studies program provides rich opportunities for relevant, real-world learning experiences. These experiences reinforce theoretical learning and at the same time provide authentic contexts in which we can apply what we have learned. In business studies, programs that provide pathways to specific apprenticeship and workplace destinations and that include cooperative education courses provide us with

valuable information and connections that help us to explore potential work and business opportunities.

Specificity within the Arts

The curriculum prepares us for a wide range of challenging careers, not only for careers in the arts. Those of us who aspire to be writers, actors, musicians, dancers, painters, or animators, for example, are not the only ones who can benefit from study of the arts. In specific art courses, we develop our ability to reason and to think critically as well as creatively. We develop our communication and collaborative skills, as well as skills in using different forms of technology. Through studying various works of art, we deepen our appreciation of diverse perspectives and develop the ability to approach others with openness and flexibility. We also learn to approach issues and present ideas in new ways, to teach and persuade, to entertain, and to make designs with attention to aesthetic considerations. Participation in arts courses helps us develop our ability to listen and observe, and enables us to become more self-aware and self-confident. It encourages us to take risks, to solve problems in creative ways, and to draw on their resourcefulness. In short, the knowledge and skills developed in the study of the arts can be applied in many other endeavours. In studying the arts, we learn about artistic principles and elements that are common to all the arts. Dance and drama share techniques in preparation and presentation, and require similar interpretive and movement skills. Music, like dance, communicates through rhythm, phrase structure, and dynamic variation; also, both have classical, traditional, and contemporary compositional features. The visual arts, dance, and drama all share elements of visual design, interpretation, and presentation – making connections among movement, space, texture, and environment. Media arts can incorporate and be interwoven through the other four disciplines as a means of recording, enhancing, and reinterpreting. All the arts reflect historical periods and cultural values that we take into consideration as architects of the future.

INDIVIDUALITY and LEARNING in COMMUNITY LIFE

Art, in its broadest sense, is a particular expression of the individual's creativity to show that individuals belong to life in all its expressions. Note that I have not styled this heading as "Individualism and Community Life." Individualism is a limiting and somewhat exclusive understanding of the person that is, in fact, contrary to the intent of the Common Curriculum as we have seen. Individuality, on the other hand, is a holistic, that is, non-limiting and inclusive understanding of the person living within a community of persons. [For an excellent introduction to the notion of holism see J. C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*, London: Macmillan (1926)].

Since we cannot be charged at birth with the self-responsibility which we will need later in life our parents and teachers have had to make judgements that limited the influences to which we were exposed in educational development during the immature stages of our growth. For most of us, our parents and teachers were wise enough not to multiply learning prohibitions beyond necessity for our good. In short, any learning prohibitions they introduced were not intended to stifle us but provide the proper and appropriate learning environment. This principle, which is reflected in the Common Curriculum, extends beyond infancy, adolescence and into adulthood. In fact, this principle is characteristic of our life-long learning that begins within the community of home and school.

It is easy for us to condemn as contrary to the universal ideals of beauty, truth, or goodness that which merely runs counter to our conservative prejudices. That the idea of individualism, as a private value, is abandoned in favour of the notion of individuality, as a public value, is seen in the educational activities outlined in the Common Curriculum. Individuality develops in a cultural and social atmosphere where it can draw on common interests and common activities and, in turn, contribute to those common

interests and activities. Our individuality leads us out of isolation, whereas, individualism leads us into isolation.

The artist, in all of us, strives for a single goal in which diverse elements find their necessary and meaningful place. In seeking this goal we experience a “unity in diversity” which is not the same as a “union of differences.” Just as individuality and individualism are not philosophically equated, nor are we to equate union and unity. For those inclined to research in the history of philosophical ideas, individualism and union belong to our classical Hellenic philosophical heritage, whereas, individuality and unity belong to a philosophically dehellenized way of thinking. [For an excellent introduction into the dehellenization of Western philosophy see Leslie Dewart’s two books, *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (1966) and *Foundations of Belief* (1969), both published by Herder and Herder.] There is no external law that determines what artists, that is, ourselves must produce, but we must take into account the properties of the materials we use. These materials are not only derived from our environment; they are our environment. Humans have the capacity to synthesize materials that will become part of the “natural” environment of future generations. As artists, we are self-determining agents and we have an individual responsibility to determine ourselves with respect to the community in which we live. I mean this not only with respect to material well-being but also with respect to metaphysical and spiritual well-being. Individuality applies to our minds as well as to our bodies. Being the “embodied minds” that we are we cannot support the exclusiveness of individualism, nor the isolation materialism. Our individuality is embodied in our materiality; the counter-view of individualism being expressed by materialism. Or, put another way, our individuality spiritualizes the body; it does not materialize the soul. [For a philosophy of the individual in community, John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, New York: Humanity Books, (1999)].

COMMUNITY LIFE and the COMMON CURRICULUM

The excessive use of competition is an example of one of the evils of the modern world. A mistaken notion arises from this excessive use in that social conduct involves the sacrifice of our individuality rather than our individuality being enriched by social conduct. Social conduct is community life. For our understanding to be genuinely humane we must understand the humanitarian relationship that exists among us as persons. The Common Curriculum reflects this.

The Common Curriculum encourages community life and supports our spiritual nature. The Common Curriculum maintains an historic continuity in a multifaith context. It secures its own past achievements and guarantees freedom for the future. In short, the Common Curriculum is an education for citizenship where all branches of the curriculum are taught as activities, not only as theories. In fulfilling its purpose the Common Curriculum is not an agenda for learning but rather an experience through which we are disciplined in activities that are for our common good and for the good of the wider world. Our life in common is not necessarily a religious life for many in our society today. On the wisdom of that notion I offer reflections in the next section.

The COMMON CURRICULUM and RELIGION

Religion, as part of the Common Curriculum in a multifaith social and cultural context, such as Ontario, presents problems that are new to us and, as yet, have no publicly accepted solution. It would be unfair, and I dare say unjust, to require publicly funded schools to engage in religious activity when, due to cultural and social diversity, so much confusion and bewilderment is suddenly introduced into the curriculum. In this context religion can be divisive. When Trustees, teachers and instructors are poorly prepared to create a cooperative future the spiritual energy of all individuals is weakened. But, some may ask: Is it appropriate to equate spiritual energy and faith? In making the distinction between religion as spiritual energy, on one hand, and faith on the

other, there is proper cause for us to recognize religion as a proper part of the Common Curriculum. Religion, as an expression of our spiritual energy as well as our cultural expression of the faith, strengthens our understanding of our individuality within the community and our understanding of the common good of society. We recognize that the history of religions is a natural activity of the human spirit and energy and hence may be part of the Common Curriculum.

In religious activity there are two things to be acknowledged from a teaching perspective by Trustees and teachers. The first may be called our religious spirit or attitude, that is, the faith. The second may be called our theology, or religious philosophy, which helps us understand the objects that evoke our religious spirit or attitude. Thus, those of us in whom the religious spirit is active cannot avoid a theology. The religious spirit acknowledges that there are objects of supreme and transcendent worth which rightly claim our respect and service. We may act in a religious manner in more than one way: in devotion to truth or art; in loving service to others where such service is felt as a divine expectation. In this latter case, however, its expression need not be the same for all.

The religious spirit, like all human movements, is expressed through a cultural and social character. Those who share the same ideals will come together in fellowship, in devotion, or to confirm their faith and to their express the corporate strength within a multifaith context. Thus the religious spirit will always require its synagogue, church, mosque, temple or hall for some form of routine ritual and spiritual symbolism. As a means and as an end within the Common Curriculum we must remember that the creeds that distinguish one religion from another can transform our personal character and individuality when sincerely held and practiced. As such, religious cultural and social phenomena are rooted in spiritual insight and understanding. Thus, they merit study as both a means and an end to achieve a greater good. It is in the interests of a comprehensive Common Curriculum that we include the religious literature of the diverse cultural and social

groups that make up Ontario's population among the subjects studied.

In Ontario, we have inherited two conflicting philosophical views concerning religious activity in education. The history of curriculum development reflects this discord. One view holds that the curriculum should contain some activity based on an historic religious community with centuries of experience in traditional belief and liturgical practice. The other view holds that the curriculum ought to leave the duty of giving shape to our beliefs to the churches, or religious houses, and the home. Historically, this debate originally took place within the dominant Christian culture in Ontario's early society. Today, however, Ontario's population is composed of a multitude of the world's religions with Christianity being numbered among them. It is from the multifaith society of Ontario, as it is today, that the Common Curriculum is to draw its religious theory and practice.

ABOUT the AUTHOR

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